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THE CURRENT SITUATION IN LAOS

The main French defensive position in Laos, on the Plaine des Jarres, is held by about 6,000 native troops and Foreign Legionnaires.

Seven Viet Minh battalions (about 6,000 men) are identified near that area and minor skirmishes have occurred. However, eleven other Viet Minh battalions are continuing to move around this position, and appear to be headed westward toward Luang Prabang, the royal capital of Laos, about 90 miles distant.

Luang Prabang is defended by only two battalions. It is considered doubtful that the French would reinforce this seemingly indefensible point. Another enemy force of two battalions is heading south in the direction of Luang Prabang. It has attacked the French post at Muong Ngoi, about 100 miles to the north.

The enemy is believed suffering serious food shortages and the onset of the rainy season is near. Cloudy weather has already impeded French air action.

French plans for a counterattack in Laos or elsewhere, if they exist, are unknown. French troops in the Tonkin Delta are being tied down by increasing guerrilla activity.

The Laotian people appear apathetic to the threat and have not yet reacted. Moreover, it is doubtful that they would resist.

Viet Minh propaganda is claiming the "liberation" of Laos. The fall of Luang Prabang and the establishment there of a "Free Laos Government" would have a profoundly adverse psychological effect throughout Indochina.

Evidence of Chinese Communist troop movements near the Indochina border is insufficient to indicate that a large scale Communist offensive into Southeast Asia is imminent.

The present Viet Minh drive is a natural outgrowth of last winter's campaign in western Tonkin. At present, it appears to be aimed only at Laos, although it may be intended to prepare the way for a campaign of wider scope next fall.

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